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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author analyzes what has happened since 1954 in the area of school integration and suggests what he feels are appropriate policies for the future. He identifies two major changes that have affected school integration since 1954--a change in residential patterns that has increased segregation in recent years, and a change in the idea of what constitutes desegregation. The courts have changed the "rules of the game," he argues, by confusing the essentially different goals of eradicating legally sanctioned segregation and overcoming the educational handicaps of blacks that have resulted from official and unofficial discrimination. The author asserts that, because of white flight to the suburbs, efforts to achieve compulsory racial balance in the schools will succeed only where there is sufficient community support for the idea. A more realistic alternative, he suggests, is to attack the effects of residential discrimination by adopting a voluntary "integrating transfer" plan that permits children to attend any school in their metropolitan area, so long as they transfer to a school with a smaller proportion of persons from their race. (JG)

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Louisville Presentation

James S. Coleman

December 5, 1975

First National Conference on Alternatives
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Compulsory Racial Balance in the Schools

James S. Coleman

December 5, 1975

I would like to begin my presentation this morning by emphasizing the seriousness of the matters at hand, the seriousness of the conflict that our nation is engaged in and that Louisville and Jefferson County are engaged in, over school desegregation. It is a conflict which has reached a stage in which none of us can afford to score points at another's expense, nor afford impassioned rhetoric designed to mobilize support for or against a particular position. Instead, whatever our initial convictions, we must have the will, the humility, and the love of country to find solutions to the problems that confront us all.

The things that I shall say will not command universal assent. Indeed, there may be no one who agrees fully with my analysis of desegregation activity and the policies I see as desirable. But what is important over these two days is that we all focus on the goal of helping our nation out of the problems it now faces: problems including both the unequal educational opportunity with which many black children - and disadvantaged children who are not black - are faced, in part due to segregation, and the loss of rights experienced by families, whose voice in their children's education has been reduced by official actions designed to overcome segregation.

Because I believe that this forum can help initiate a comprehensive look at a problem which until now has been argued primarily in courtrooms and Federal agencies, I want to extend my gratitude to all those who have communicated to me about it: first to Judge Hollenbach, whom I believe is to be commended for having organized the first such forum

held in this country. In addition, I want to thank Galen Martin, of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, who sent me materials relevant to desegregation in Louiville; to thank several newspaper reporters from the Courier Journal and Times with whom I have talked; and to the many others from Louisville and Jefferson County who have been in touch with me.

What I want to do this morning is to first analyze what has happened in our country since 1954 with regard to segregation and desegregation, as I see it, and then based on that analysis to indicate what I believe are appropriate policies for the future. Whether these policies are available to Louisville in the immediate future depends on judicial decisions, but judicial decisions themselves depend in part on the kinds of analysis and information conferences like this can provide.

It is useful to begin the analysis by going back to 1957, when Louisville desegregated its schools under a plan devised by Dr. Omer Carmichael, superintendent of schools. Louisville's plan was regarded as a model response to the Supreme Court decision of 1954 which outlawed officially segregated school systems. The New York Times commented editorially that Louisville was "a city of many claims to fame, but no achievement so well commands the quiet satisfaction of a job well done as the orderly, unexcited acceptance of desegregation within the public schools that took place there."

What has happened between 1957 and 1975? Why did the desegregation that in 1957 constituted compliance with the constitution and occassioned the praise of the New York Times not settle the matter, at least as far as constitutional questions were concerned?

The answer lies, I believe, in two kinds of changes that have occurred since that time. One is a change in residential patterns that

has increased segregation in recent years; another is a change in the idea of what constitutes desegregation, a kind of escalation of desegregating activities leading ultimately to compulsory racial balance in all the schools of a school system - a policy that would never have even been imagined in 1957.

The first change involved an extensive suburbanization by white families accompanied by growth in the number of black families in the central city. The suburbanization arose from great increases in economic affluence, ease of automobile transportation, and industrial development in the suburbs. Blacks did not participate in this, principally through residential discrimination which confined them to the central city, but also because of lesser economic resources. The overall result of all this was that a desegregation plan that, due to geographic constraints on place of residence was reasonably effective in 1957, was no longer effective in the 1970's, when those constraints had been removed for many whites - though not for many blacks. Consequently, if no other change whatsoever had taken place, the Louisville metropolitan area, and many other metropolitan areas of its size and larger, had become increasingly segregated in residence and in schools.

But a second change had taken place as well - a change in the very definition of what was regarded as segregated, and what constitutes desegregation. Thus <u>even</u> if the suburbanization and increased separation of blacks and whites <u>had not</u> taken place between 1957 and 1975, the "desegregation" of 1957 which all agreed constituted a responsible and active compliance with the Supreme Court decision of 1954, would not constitute "desegregation" in 1975. The ground had shifted; a different set of rules, which would indeed have been puzzling to anyone back in 1957, was now being applied, requiring that children be assigned to each

school in the system to achieve roughly the same proportion of blacks (or whites) in each school.

How did this change of the rules of the game come about? In the answer to this question lies, I believe, the fundamental errors and fundamental problems of the current desegregating activities, both in the North and in the South. Two quite different goals, both important goals of the society, have become confused, and because they are not clearly distinguished, desegregation policies have lost the clarity of purpose, as well as the popular support, they once had. The importance of keeping the goals sharply distinguished lies in the fact that different instruments of policy are appropriate for each - the courts, insulated from public opinion, for one, and political institutions responsive to public opinion, for the other.

The first goal was, and is, the eradication from American education of a pattern, which held throughout the South, including Louisville, until after 1954, in which blacks were assigned to one set of schools and whites to another - that is, the eradication of official separation of children into different schools by race. It is important to see this goal clearly, for it is a well-defined goal, and one which has nothing to do with "benefitting disadvantaged children," or solving the problems of poor achievement among disadvantaged blacks. Nor does it suggest in any way the creation of racially balanced schools within a system. It is, clear and simple, the eradication of legally-sanctioned segregation. The goal is and was achieved in Louisville when the dual school system was eliminated.

The second goal arose later, with the civil rights movement of the 1960's. This goal was the overcoming of educational handicaps carried by blacks over generations as a result of official and unofficial discrimination, and ultimately bringing into being a strongly integrated society with equal participation by blacks and whites. This goal was manifested in many ways: in Head Start programs, in Title I programs under the elementary and secondary education act, in other compensatory educational programs - and also through desegregation. But this was desegregation with a different purpose - desegregation designed in considerable part to benefit disadvantaged children - and desegregation over and above the desegregation arising by eradication of officially-sanctioned separation of blacks and whites. Such desegregation has been carried out voluntarily by many communities. The report of 1966 with which I am associated, the "Coleman Report" as it is popularly known, encouraged this by the results it showed, of educational benefits to disadvantaged children by being in predominantly middle class schools. And it is a goal that I believe should be actively pursued, to the extent that it is educationally beneficial, that it aids in the development of positive interracial attitudes, and that it brings us closer to an integrated society. It can be pursued not merely by "integrating the schools" as commonly conceived, but by interracial experiences of many sorts, in and out of schools, by extensive interaction among schools with different racial compositions, by interracial summer activities, both formally and informally so. But it is by no means a constitutional requirement, and has no place in court decisions concerned with constitutional requirements.

Since 1971, the courts have recognized this, and such matters no

longer play an explicit role in court decisions. But by this time the pattern of compulsory racial balance through the courts had been established, through a confusion and confounding of these two separate goals, the first a constitutional requirement, and the second not. A different device then came to be used by plaintiffs in court cases to maintain this pattern of court-imposed remedies, that is, finding isolated instances of official actions reinforcing segregation and then arguing that all segregation in the system must be due to such actions and must be eliminated by court-imposed compulsory racial balance - achievable in large cities only through bussing. This is the device that was used in Louisville, leading to the recent court order. Such a device would never have been possible, I believe, if there had not first existed an overwhelming confusion of the two quite separate goals involved in desegregation. It is this confusion, followed by the legal device, which has, I believe, in the name of desegregation, seriously undercut the second goal by preventing innovative interracial activities that do not meet the improperly -imposed requirements, and in some cities by accelerating the white flight that hastens and sharpens residential separation of blacks and whites.

It is in the perspective of all this that one can give an answer to the question often posed: How then do you solve the problem in large cities, if not through bussing? With the perspective that I have just outlined, the question as posed becomes meaningless. For there is not "a" problem; there are two: one is the elimination of officially-created segregation, and that problem has been solved, with the exception of minor traces - and it was solved in Louisville in 1957. The second is the problem of improving the educational opportunitites of black

children, and through that, achieving an integrated society, with black children, youth, and adults in full and equal participation in the society. That problem is solved by a variety of means, including residential and school integration, but not by eliminating all-black schools, nor by eliminating all racial imbalances in neighborhood or school. It is a problem that is not solved by instant reorganization of the school system, but by hard work over a period of time. It is not a problem that the upper middle classes, who always have the means to provide their children with desirable educational options, can solve by merging blacks and whites who lack the economic means for such options.

There are some persons who regard the constitutional requirement for eradication of officially-sanctioned segregation - the first goal that I have described - as satisfied only if there is full-scale racial balance among schools, and who thus regard the courts as the proper agencies for achieving this. Such an interpretation, however, in view of the experiences of all racial and ethnic groups in American history - and indeed the history of every country with a school system - is preposterous on its face. For some degree of naturally-occurring segregation in residence and thus in schools has existed between all ethnic groups, and any proposal to eliminate it by requiring ethnic balance throughout a school system, for example, between Irish, Poles, Jews, and WASPS, would be properly rejected, as a serious incursion by the government upon individual rights.

The special circumstance of black-white segregation, and the circumstance that must be overcome, is the residential discrimination that excludes blacks with economic resources from areas to which they would move if such discrimination were absent. That special circumstance does

not, of course, imply policies such as compulsory racial balance in the schools; but it is not a circumstance to be disregarded, and is one to which I will address some remarks when I turn to the question of what policies may be appropriate.

I am not at all suggesting that compulsory racial balance in the schools of a system is always and everywhere wrong. In some instances, where there is widespread community support for such a plan, as there has been in Evanston, Illinois, in Berkeley, California, and some other small school systems, the school board may well decide that such reorganization is desirable, and carry it out. In some instances of very small school systems, I might well support such a plan myself if it were accompanied by sufficient community support to provide the hard work and unity of purpose to make it successful. Even there, however, my research results on white flight would introduce in me a degree of caution: success of integration means not just that the schools are quiet, well-attended, and that the children are learning. It means also that those whites with the resources to move do not move, and so that the system remains integrated - and does not become, in a few years a segregated predominantly black system, as occurred for example, in Riverside, California, once regarded as a successful example of full-scale integration.

Nor am I saying that those who favor compulsory racial balance through court orders are not sincere and well-motivated. The difficulty is that the sincerity and good intentions of a policy's proponents do not prevent its negative consequences - whether these consequences are extensive disruption of a school system, as in Boston and Louisville, or an acceleration of the flight of whites from city schools, as has happened in other cities. Indeed, it is this very well-intentioned sincerity on

one side, coupled with the obvious racial prejudice of some opponents to bussing or to any form of school integration, that has led many persons to side with the "right-thinking people" and against the "bigots and racists", without seriously examining the issues themselves. Anyone favoring racial integration in society would never want to be associated with Louise Day Hicks and those who believe as she does. But this assent to a policy through dissociation from its opponents is misplaced on any issue, and certainly on an issue as important as that of school desegregation. A policy must be judged on its merits, not on the basis of the attractiveness of the people who support and oppose it.

Alternatives to bussing

If we ask the question, quite practically, what are alternatives to bussing, then it must be answered by a question in response: Alternatives for what purpose? If to achieve a constitutional requirement, then eradication of any traces of officially-created segregation is the alternative, a policy which certainly does not require bussing, nor any assignment of children to other than a neighborhood school. This, of course, will eliminate very little of the school segregation that currently exists in any school system. And it will not overcome that segregation which has emerged through the extensive suburbanization that I described earlier. If, on the other hand, the purpose is to increase the educational opportunity of disadvantaged black children, then the very first task is to ask just what is the evidence that school desegregation does increase the educational opportunity of black children. I will not go into this evidence in any detail, because my own recent

research concerns other consequences of desegregation. But there are some points that stand out. First, the implications of my earlier research in the "Coleman Report" are that desegregation would be beneficial for achievement of disadvantaged blacks, although we did not examine the effects of desegregation per se. But more recent research, which has examined desegregation explicitly shows far more equivocal results. When beneficial achievement results are found, they are very small, and in some of the most well-conducted studies, there are no beneficial results at all.* Nor has the research shown general increases in favorable interracial attitudes. Thus on the basis of the research evidence, the use of compulsory racial balance to benefit disadvantaged black children has hardly been a conclusive success.

The indications are, in short, that we should not look for "alternatives to bussing" to benefit disadvantaged black children, because there is no clear evidence that bussing itself benefits disadvantaged children. We should instead ask the more appropriate question: What are the most effective ways of increasing the educational opportunity of disadvantaged black children? I will not pretend to know what all these ways

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* A comprehensive review of many of these studies, by Nancy St. John (School Desegregation: New York: John Wiley, 1975) shows the generally disappointing results. Another review by a long-time ardent advocate of school integration, Mayer Weinberg, while remaining optimistic, nevertheless does not find much to be optimistic about.
A carefully controlled study of desegregation over a period of years in Riverside, California, released since these reviews, shows no beneficial effects; and David Armor's study of the Metro program in Boston shows no beneficial effects

are, or what the most effective of them are: but I do want to discuss one way in which the educational opportunity of black children can be effectively increased, in cities throughout this country. To give a sense of why I propose this particular way requires returning again to a point I raised before: with increasing economic affluence, increasing geographic mobility, and thus decreasing residential constraints, white families have been able to move to suburbs, while blacks, because of residential discrimination, have not. Thus what is critically important is to provide for black children a right they would have had if they had been white, and for poor white children a right they would have had if they had been more economically affluent: that is, the right of every child, to attend any school in the metropolitan area (not merely in his or her school district), so long as the transfer from their neighborhood school is to a school with a smaller proportion of persons from their own race. This might be called an "integrating transfer" plan throughout the metropolitan area. Such a plan would involve bussing, of course, at public expense, but voluntary bussing only, and bussing that would very likely be primarily from the inner city outward. While compulsory bussing to achieve racial balance reduces everyone's rights, such a voluntary "integrating transfer" plan would constitute an <u>expansion</u> of rights for each child: not only the right to attend his neighborhood school, but <u>also</u> the right to attend any other school in the metropolitan area, so long as it had no higher a proportion of his own race than his neighborhood school. Thus it would not provide a means to escape integration, but it would provide a means for families to overcome the residential discrimination which has excluded them - particularly if they are black -

from certain schools. This would not be accomplished, of course, without a loss of rights: the right to maintain a public school homogeneous in race or class. Each school in the metropolitan area would be required, under such a plan, to accept up to 10 or 20% of students from outside its attendance zone, if students from outside its attendance zone chose to attend it.

A plan of this sort would be far more than an alternative to bussing; it would be an effective means of providing equal educational opportunity for all children in a metropolitan area, through an expansion of rights. It can very well be argued that in contrast, compulsory racial balance in a school system constitutes a system-wide reduction of opportunity.

Some persons may question whether such a plan could ever come into existence, without a veto power from suburban school districts. It would, of course, require action at the state or Federal level, not at the school district level. But such action may not be far away. A bill similar to this plan was introduced into the Massachusetts legislature last year, the Sullivan-Daly bill; and far more promising, a similar plan is one of the provisions of the bill recently introduced into Congress by Congressman Richardson Preyer. Congressman Preyer will be here, and will be better able to speak about his bill than I can; so I will say only that the bill provides the most promising possibility I have yet seen for equalizing the educational opportunity of children of all races and socio-economic levels throughout a metropolitan area.

Before closing, I should like to say a word about my recent research, research which has caused me, not to reevaluate my position with regard

to the goal of school integration, but with regard to the means that are currently being used to achieve it in the large cities. My research has shown that desegregation in central cities causes, in the large cities, a sharp increase in the loss of whites from the central city school system - thus defeating its purpose by recreating segregation between a black central city and white suburbs. The research shows that this loss of white children is most pronounced when the proportion of blacks in the desegregating system is high, and there is extensive availability of white suburbs outside the desegregating district to which whites may move.

These research results are not directly relevant to the Louisville-Jefferson County desegregation. They would not lead to a prediction of high white flight from the Louisville-Jefferson County schools, both because the proportion of blacks in the County is low, and because the desegregation is county-wide, and not limited to the city.

What Louisville's experience suggests instead is what happens when there is not such an outlet, when the reactions against what is regarded by many people as an arbitrary restriction of rights cannot take the form of leaving the scene. It suggest that if metropolitan-wide compulsory racial balance, as almost happened in Detroit and has happened in Louisville, takes place, then the compulsory racial balance through bussing will not merely have helped to polarize the suburbs and city into whites and blacks, as it has already done, but will generate enormous social conflict, of which Louisville's experience

is only a straw in the wind.

In closing, I want to reiterate what I said at the outset. We are in the midst of a very extensive social conflict, not a conflict between blacks and whites, for a majority of both races oppose compulsory bussing. but a conflict between certain social policies enacted by the courts and the Federal Government, and many of the people subject to these policies. What is important for us to do here is not to act as adversaries, as if we were lawyers pursuing the interests of a client in court, but to seek a solution to the impasse which has come to develop. I hope that in these two days, we will be able to come closer to seeing a solution of that impasse than has been possible to date.